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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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## A WORLD CENSUS OF INCUNABULA.

When the art of printing was invented towards the middle of the fifteenth century a profound impression of the importance of the discovery was quickly made upon the general public, and in the course of a few score years presses had been established in almost every country of Europe. The early printers seem to have worked with surprising zeal and rapidity, and the result was an enormous number of editions published in many different places before the close of the century.

But with the passing of time people inevitably lost interest in these early productions of the press, and they in consequence soon fell into almost complete oblivion. It was therefore not until several centuries had elapsed that any one began to think the earliest printed books worthy of serious attention. By degrees the book collectors and bibliographers became interested in the older literature in printed form, and thenceforth early books came more and more into public favor in educated circles.

During the whole of the eighteenth century the efforts at cataloguing old books were rather desultory, and no very sharp distinctions were drawn between them and other literary curiosities. After a time, however, both librarians and bibliographers began to consider fifteenth century books as a separate and distinct portion of a large library. A movement arose in consequence which was designed to gather such books together under the name of incunabula, and to consider them as next in importance to the Mediæval and Classical manuscripts.

Bibliographers now set to work in earnest to describe and catalogue such incunabula as they were able to find, and this new departure in the book world has continued to meet with such favor that at the present time many enterprises of this sort are under way.

It would seem, therefore, to be an opportune

moment for the taking of a preliminary World Census of Incunabula in order to make our ideas as to the extent and importance of this sort of literature more definite and precise.

In the taking of a census various kinds of information may be taken into account. In the present instance we may limit the inquiry to the following questions :

1. How many editions were published ?
2. How many copies are extant ?

It should, of course, be stated at the outset that a definite answer to either of these questions is entirely impossible. The most that can be hoped for is a reasonably plausible estimate based upon such pertinent facts as may be ascertainable at the present time. The answer to the second question, it may be remarked, is much the harder of the two owing to a general lack of sufficient data.

### 1. *Editions Published.*

The first task which incunabulum bibliographers have commonly set themselves has been the drawing up of a list of all the editions published in the fifteenth century. It has been customary to limit such an investigation oftentimes to a town or country, but Ludwig Hain appears to have been the first bibliographer to undertake such an enumeration for all the countries of Europe.

His world-famous *Repertorium Bibliographicum* was published between the years 1826 and 1838, but the author did not live to complete his great undertaking, and the last volume was published two years after his death from his unfinished manuscript. This bibliography lists 16,311 editions, and it was based chiefly on the large collection of incunabula in the Staatsbibliothek at München. If the author had been asked to estimate the entire number of editions published in the fifteenth century it seems likely that he would not have placed the figure above 20,000 ; but we shall see presently how both the actual figures and the estimates have kept steadily rising as time went on.

Dr. Copinger in his *Supplement to Hain* pub-

lished from 1895 to 1902 added 6832 titles, and thus brought the total number up to 23,143. Since 1902 Dr. Reichling has published four *Appendices* describing 1427 further editions, and bringing the total up to 24,570.<sup>1</sup>

In 1904 the Prussian government appointed a Kommission für den Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, and at the outset it was estimated that there were 30,000 fifteenth century editions.<sup>2</sup>

In 1908 Mr. G. K. Fortescue, Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum, in speaking of the matter said: "It is by no means improbable that the total number extant may be about thirty thousand."<sup>3</sup>

Likewise in 1908 Mr. R. A. Peddie of St. Bride Foundation, London, began the publication of a new conspectus, which he estimates will contain about 30,000 entries.<sup>4</sup> The letters A-B have been completed and contain 7128 entries (without addenda). Now as Hain has 4186 for A-B (without addenda), and Copinger adds 1397 (without addenda), it follows that at the same rate Mr. Peddie's bibliography will have 29,547 entries (without addenda).

To arrive at a proper estimate of the entire number of editions there must still be made a certain allowance for omissions. A great many libraries the world over have not yet been thoroughly searched for incunabula, and it is likely that they contain quite a number of editions not known to the bibliographers mentioned above. Then, too, it is quite probable that some of the fifteenth century editions have completely disappeared by this time, if we are to judge from the rather large number of apparently unique copies of incunabula that are now on record. Further

search will doubtless show some of these to be extant in more than one copy, yet all of these cases will certainly never result thus; and in the other direction a similar state of affairs must exist.

The various special bibliographies now in course of publication will keep on adding new titles to the general lists, and we will probably not be far from the truth in estimating the total number of editions published in the fifteenth century to have been 35,000.

## 2. Copies Extant.

In attempting to estimate the number of copies of incunabula extant in all the libraries of the world we are at once confronted by the fact that in a large majority of the libraries probably the incunabula have never been counted. To give an idea of the number of libraries containing incunabula it may be stated that Germany, Austria, Italy and France together have considerably over a thousand such libraries, without reckoning the rest of the world.

In taking a census we are thus forced to avail ourselves of a series of estimates with which to supplement the actual counts of incunabula in certain libraries. In the following attempt at a census the counts and estimates will most conveniently be grouped by countries in accordance with the usual kind of information that is at present available. The various countries will be taken up in the decreasing order of the number of copies which they probably contain.

### a. Germany.

Information concerning the number of incunabula in German libraries has been available to a certain extent for a long time past. To go no further back than the year 1875, we find in the fifth edition of Dr. Julius Petzholdt's *Adressbuch der Bibliotheken Deutschlands*<sup>5</sup> statistics given which indicate the presence of 36,190 copies in but 23 libraries whose contents were estimated in round numbers.

In 1893 Dr. Paul Schwenke published a more

<sup>1</sup> For these statistics see R. A. Peddie, *Fifteenth Century Books: An Author Index*, in *The Library World*, N. S., Vol. XI (1908), p. 43. Nos. 5 and 6 (1910) not included.

<sup>2</sup> Direktor Prof. Dr. Häbler, *Der Incunabelkatalog der Bibliotheken Deutschlands*, in *Mitteilungen des Oesterr. Vereins für Bibliothekswesen*, Vol. XIII (1909), pp. 74-87. See p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> See prefatory note to the *Catalogue of Books printed in the XVth Century now in the British Museum*, Part I. London: 1908.

<sup>4</sup> The following is an extract from a personal letter dated Mar. 30, 1910: "I estimate that my work will contain about 30,000 entries. The first volume which will be out in a few days contains A-B with 7128 entries."

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Julius Petzholdt, *Adressbuch der Bibliotheken Deutschlands mit Einschluss von Oesterreich-Ungarn und der Schweiz*, neu herausgegeben von —. Dresden: G. Schönfeld's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1875. 8vo., xii and 526 pp.

complete *Adressbuch*<sup>6</sup> for the libraries of Germany, and in this statistics are given for 374 libraries with 113,860 copies. These figures are partly due to actual counts, and partly to estimates, but there were besides a large number of libraries that were cited indefinitely in the matter of incunabula.

Dr. Häbler states in the article previously cited that the Prussian commission originally estimated that the public libraries of Germany contained about 100,000 copies, but that after several years of work in this field they were obliged to raise their estimate to 120,000 copies. Up to April 1, 1909, the commission had inventoried 347 libraries containing about 60,000 copies.

In a personal letter to the author of the present article dated April 7, 1910, Dr. Häbler reaffirms this estimate of 120,000 copies for the public libraries, to which he would add 12,000 copies for the private libraries of Germany.<sup>7</sup>

But as we must recognize the practical impossibility of attaining to a complete enumeration, especially in the case of private libraries, it would seem reasonable to place the total figure for Germany at 140,000 copies, by far the largest for any country in the world.

The latest edition of Trübner's *Minerva*<sup>8</sup> gives

<sup>6</sup>Dr. Paul Schwenke, *Adressbuch der Deutschen Bibliotheken*, bearbeitet von —. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz 1893. 8vo., iv, xx and 411 pp. (Zehntes Beiheft zum *Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*.)

<sup>7</sup>Kommission für den Gesamtkatalog  
der Wiegendrucke, Berlin W. 64,  
Behrenstr. 40, d. 7. April 1910.

SEHR GEEHRTER HERR!

Bei Begründung der Kommission für den Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke hatte man angenommen, dass es in Deutschland, ausser im Besitz von Privatpersonen, etwa 100,000 Exemplare von Inkunabeln gäbe. Die Inventarisierungsarbeiten, die jetzt ihrem Ende nahe sind, haben aber gezeigt, dass es in Wirklichkeit etwa 120,000 Exemplare sein werden. Wie viel man für privat Sammlungen dazu rechnen darf, ist schwer zu schätzen. 10,000 wird zu niedrig, 20,000 entschieden zu hoch gerechnet sein. Ich schätze annähernd 12,000; also Summa 132,000.

Zu weiterer Auskunft gern bereit . . . bin ich  
Ihr sehr ergebener

K. HÄBLER.

<sup>8</sup>Dr. K. Trübner, *Minerva: Jahrbuch der Gelehrten Welt*, begründet von —. Neunzehnter Jahrgang, 1909-1910.

a total of 65,943 copies for German libraries, but only some 52 of the larger collections are listed.

#### b. Italy.

Italy was the second home of the art of printing in the fifteenth century, and hence it is not surprising to find a very large number of incunabula still preserved in its libraries.

In the years 1893-1896 the Italian government published a detailed *Statistica delle Biblioteche*,<sup>9</sup> which lists the collections of incunabula in 247 libraries with a total of 64,337 copies. To this figure should be added the collection in the Vatican Library numbering about 2500 copies,<sup>10</sup> and perhaps those of other church libraries not investigated by the government officials. Allowing for some omissions we would have the number 75,000 for the public libraries, and with perhaps 15,000 for private libraries not included above, we would have the final figure of 90,000 copies for all the libraries of Italy.

Trübner's *Minerva* gives 35,297 copies for only 43 libraries.

#### c. Austria.

Austria occupies the peculiar position in the library world of having still preserved its old monastic libraries largely intact, and it is quite possible that the official statistics are on that account not as complete as they are for the other countries near by.

Already in 1875 Dr. Petzholdt listed in his previously cited work 75 libraries in Austria with collections of incunabula totaling 36,285 copies. In the fuller catalogue of Austrian libraries published by Drs. Johann Bohatta and Michael Holzmänn in 1900<sup>11</sup> this total has been raised to 53,134

Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1910. 12mo., ii, lviii and 1512 pp.

<sup>9</sup>Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio (Direzione Generale della Statistica), *Statistica delle Biblioteche*. Parte I, Volume I. Roma: Tipografia Nazionale di G. Bertero, 1893. 8vo., xlviii and 208 pp. Parte I, Volume II. Roma; 1894. 8vo., iv and 295 pp. Parte II. Roma: 1896. 8vo., xvi and 154 pp.

<sup>10</sup>See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., s. v. Libraries (Vol. XIV, 1882, p. 529).

<sup>11</sup>Dr. Johann Bohatta und Dr. Michael Holzmänn, *Adressbuch der Bibliotheken der Oesterreich-ungarischen Monarchie*. Wien: Carl Fromme, . . . 1900. 8vo., viii, 576 and 5 pp. (Schriften des "Oesterreichischen Vereines für Bibliothekswesen.")

copies preserved in some 181 libraries. Allowing for omissions and judging partly by the case of Germany, we may assume the figure 70,000 for the copies in the public and monastic libraries. Of private libraries in Austria we know but little, but we can safely credit them with 15,000 copies considering their proximity to Germany on the one hand and to Italy on the other, thus giving a total for Austria of 85,000 copies.

Trübner's *Minerva* gives a total of 36,920 copies for only 29 libraries.

#### d. England (U. K.).

It seems very strange that so little is known concerning the statistics of the collections of incunabula to be found in English libraries both public and private. The British Museum contains more than 10,000 copies,<sup>12</sup> but beyond this pertinent information was found to be difficult to obtain. Mr. R. A. Peddie, in the letter previously drawn upon for editions, says: "It is impossible to say how many 15th. century books there are in this country. No statistics are available."

The universities are, however, known to have large collections of incunabula, and many other public libraries are doubtless also well supplied with them. We may, therefore, assume the number 50,000 for the public libraries of the United Kingdom.

English private libraries appear to be particularly numerous and important, and the collecting of incunabula and other rare books in England has at times assumed the proportions of a craze. We can, therefore, posit the number 25,000 for the private libraries of the country, and thus reach a total of 75,000 copies for England, including Scotland and Ireland.

Trübner's *Minerva* gives statistics for only one library, the Rylands Library at Manchester with its 2500 copies.

#### e. France.

The smaller public libraries of France appear to have been carefully catalogued as regards incu-

nabula, and fairly complete statistics are available; but in regard to the number of incunabula in the larger public libraries there still seems to be room for doubt. For the semi-public and private libraries no information is at hand.

In 1897 M. Léopold Delisle stated<sup>13</sup> that Mlle. Marie Pellechet had examined four large libraries in Paris and 176 libraries in the provinces, all of which presumably contained incunabula. He stated further that she records in her first volume the existence of some 6272 copies. At the same average rate for the remaining volumes the completed work will record 34,346 copies. Making allowances for some omissions, especially in the larger libraries, and for others not examined by her, we may estimate the total number of incunabula in the public and semi-public libraries of France at 50,000 copies.

As the French are enthusiastic collectors of rare books we may estimate the number of incunabula in private libraries at 20,000, thus bringing the total for all the libraries of France to some 70,000 copies.

Trübner's *Minerva* gives statistics for 118 libraries, most of them actual counts, which total 18,861 copies.

#### f. Spain.

The only available statistics for incunabula in Spanish libraries appear to be those given by Trübner's *Minerva*, which lists only eight libraries with 4679 copies. But Dr. Häbler in the letter previously cited states that the Prussian commission has an expert now in Spain, and that he has been reporting quite a large number of incunabula in the Spanish libraries. When his investigation is completed the results may show from 40,000 to 50,000 copies in the public libraries.

Adopting the smaller figure, and allowing 10,000 copies for the private libraries, we would arrive at a total of 50,000 copies for all the libraries of Spain.

#### g. Russia.

Library statistics for Russia have been largely inaccessible, but through the kindness of Mr. Babine of the Library of Congress in Washing-

<sup>12</sup> Reginald Arthur Rye, *The Libraries of London: A Guide for Students*, prepared on the instruction of the Senate of the University of London. London: published by the University of London, 1908. 8vo., 90 pp. See p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> See his review of Mlle. Pellechet's *Catalogue Général des Incunables des Bibliothèques Publiques de France*, Tome I, in the *Journal des Savants*, Année 1897, pp. 613-627. (Letter from M. Louis Polain received too late to use.)

ton it has been ascertained that the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg contains 7000 incunabula.

It seems likely also that many libraries in Russian territory near the Western frontier contain large collections of incunabula, so that we may estimate 40,000 copies for all the libraries of Russia.

#### h. America.

Of late years many small collections of incunabula have been finding their way to American libraries, and under the auspices of the Bibliographical Society of America an effort is now being made to compile a checklist of them both for public and private libraries.

Through the kindness of Miss Margaret W. Righter of the Free Library of Philadelphia it has been learned that on May 6, 1910, the contents of 71 public libraries with 4841 copies and 61 private libraries with 3366 copies had been listed.

Allowing liberally for collections not yet catalogued, we may estimate that 20,000 copies exist in all the libraries of America.

#### i. Minor Collections.

There are also a few statistics available for other countries whose libraries contain a certain number of incunabula. Basing our estimates on these meagre data, and taking into consideration the importance of their libraries, we may add somewhat to our totals in the summary statistical table which follows.

Incunabula in small numbers are probably scattered far and wide, as the colonization of many countries by European peoples has tended to disseminate the products of the early printing presses.

STATISTICAL TABLE.

Countries.	Estimates.
a. Germany, . . . . .	140,000
b. Italy, . . . . .	90,000
c. Austria, . . . . .	85,000
d. England, . . . . .	75,000
e. France, . . . . .	70,000
f. Spain, . . . . .	50,000
g. Russia, . . . . .	40,000
h. America, . . . . .	20,000
i. Switzerland, . . . . .	10,000
j. Belgium, . . . . .	10,000

Countries.	Estimates.
k. Holland, . . . . .	10,000
l. Denmark, . . . . .	5,000
m. Portugal, . . . . .	5,000
n. Sweden, . . . . .	5,000
o. English Colonies, . . . . .	10,000
p. Other Countries, . . . . .	25,000
Grand Total, . . . . .	650,000

As the present World Census of Incunabula would appear to be the first attempt in this field, its imperfections and inexactitudes are probably many, but no one will watch with greater interest than its author what the results of later investigations by the incunabulum specialists will be as compared with the above forecast.

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#### CAXTON REPRODUCTIONS : A BIBLIOGRAPHY.

American students of Caxton are dependent for the materials of their study almost wholly upon reproductions, since the number of original Caxtons owned by public institutions in America is extremely small. It has therefore seemed to me that a list of these reproductions may be of service to present or future students of the subject. I have included in this list all of the works of Caxton's press of which reproductions are known to me. But in the case of a few works of which the reprints are rather numerous, I have not tried to include every edition. Nor have I tried to give more in the way of bibliographical detail than will suffice for practical purposes.

Caxton's works are here referred to by means of the numbers and titles given in Blades' list, as set forth in his *Biography and Typography of William Caxton*, L. 1877, pp. 165 ff. Blades' list, tho not perfect for all purposes, is very accurate, perfectly definite, and well known, and it furnishes the simplest means of defining with exactness a given work of Caxton's press. In the case of works of which Caxton published several editions, the numbers denoting the later editions are set down side by side with the